

# Zoology Undergraduates “Reach into Research”: Student Volunteers Program

Ashley Edwards, Susan M. Jones, Erik Wapstra, Alastair Richardson and Simon Talbot



Despite curricula emphasising student-led enquiry, some students still struggle to find relevance and excitement in their undergraduate courses. How can we better foster an appreciation of how research informs current knowledge and provide our undergraduates with authentic research experiences?



"Going out and working with researchers really shows you what it's all about...you make good contacts, you get to know researchers, they give you advice for when you come to do honours...you learn a lot and you have fun doing it!"



"I couldn't be more appreciative of the opportunity to get out into the 'real world' and do some work!...gives you a very good idea of what you are getting yourself into if you want to pursue Zoology as a career"

Over summer 05/06, Zoology undergraduates were given the opportunity to engage with active researchers and gain valuable field and laboratory experience and skills to inform their decisions about Honours and Postgraduate options, as well as in their experiences outside university life.



Undergraduate volunteering "lead into fulltime work at TAFI" (Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute)



"I would recommend this program to anyone who wants to know what sort of work they can expect to do with a science degree"



Participation in this program is voluntary, and open primarily to students who have completed at least their second year of study in Zoology. Volunteers are matched with research mentors, usually postgraduate students of the School, for short-term, in-house research placements that may offer either laboratory or field experiences. The participants are given a real taste of research in action, the opportunity to develop a suite of new skills, and the chance to work with professional scientists.

"I liked the wide variety of projects, and the way you could select the projects that you liked or that you had time for"



"I liked seeing all aspects of what occurs during a research experiment"



Participants are also given the opportunity to acquire additional qualifications such as workplace level 2 first aid, Scientific diving and accountable persons training, and oxygen resuscitation for divers.

"These experiences were the best opportunity to get to see what field research is actually like"



"It was a fantastic opportunity to gain some hands-on experience which I think is one of the most valuable learning tools there is"

The program has been embraced enthusiastically by our undergraduates: evaluation surveys have been overwhelmingly positive. Students comment that the experience has opened their eyes to the excitement of scientific research, and has encouraged them to see themselves as 'researchers of the future'. Furthermore, the mentors also benefit, not only from gaining assistance with data collection, but also by developing valuable generic skills in guiding, supervising and training junior colleagues. A flow-on effect of this project should be greater participation at Honours and Postgraduate levels.